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The Aleutians -- Lessons From A Forgotten Campaign

by

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for the use and misuse of theory. The operational planner of the 1990's is cautioned about the unique nature of the Aleutians (and all historical examples) by a strong reference to context. If lessons of history can be learned with theoretical and practical value to the reader than the monograph will have served its purpose in this study of an extraordinary American campaign. The geographical isolation, interservice miscommunications, strategic, operational and tactical linkage failures, and the element of unpreparedness which marked the Aleutians will probably be revisited by the American military in the next several decades.

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### ABSTRACT

THE ALEUTIANS - LESSONS FROM A FORGOTTEN CAMPAIGN by Major David H. Huntton Jr., U.S.A., 48 pages.

→ This monograph analyzes the campaign in the Aleutians of 1943 in which Japanese and U.S. forces struggled violently for strategic control of austere ground in what has been aptly called the "forgotten war". Several theoretical concepts are tested against the backdrop of the Aleutian campaign. These are the role of leadership and command and control, the perils of conducting ad hoc joint operations, and the critical linkages between the tactical, operational and strategic levels of war.

The Aleutian campaign offers significant insights as one of the first joint amphibious operations of the Second World War in a misunderstood and relatively unknown theater. This campaign reflected planning errors which led to disastrous operational results. Both the Japanese and American sides are analyzed to understand the campaign process from planning to execution to end state.

The theoretical concepts are then examined in greater depth with conclusions for the use and misuse of theory. The operational planner of the 1990's is cautioned about the unique nature of the Aleutians (and all historical examples) by a strong reference to context. If lessons of history can be learned with theoretical and practical value to the reader then the monograph will have served its purpose in this study of an extraordinary American campaign. It is argued that the geographical isolation, interservice miscommunications, strategic, operational, and tactical linkage failures, and the element of unpreparedness which marked the Aleutians will probably be revisited by the American military in the next several decades.

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## Introduction

In the summer of 1943, the United States and the Imperial Japanese Empire struggled violently over one of the most desolate pieces of ground in the Northern Pacific. The Aleutian chain of islands, part of the territory of Alaska, became the battleground for a dramatic conflict in the Second World War. The campaign for the Aleutians represented on both sides key strategic objectives and interests, and eventually cost considerable lives. Why did the Japanese go there? What was the risk? What was the value? What lessons can be learned in the U.S. campaign to retake the islands? Do elements of Clausewitz and other military theoreticians prove true in this 'forgotten war'? And what is the significance of the Aleutians to the operational planner of the 1990's? The study of the Aleutian campaign gives us an opportunity to test certain theoretical propositions in light of a bona fide operational campaign. The results should confirm or deny the validity of selected theory against the setting of the sacrifice of both Japanese and American fighting men in pursuit of diametrically opposite national goals.

Military theory makes practical sense when it is tested against the harsh lessons of human conflict. Several theoretical concepts can be examined in the campaign for the Aleutians. These include the linkages between operational execution and the original strategic goals of each nation state, the special role of senior leadership in the face of friction, the role of command, control, and communications, and the part which the fog of war played throughout the campaign. If these concepts work in the Aleutian campaign, can



they be extended to U.S. global responsibilities today with a very different force structure? What is different and what has changed?

Clausewitz was very careful to note throughout his writing that the context of his time was the one best suited for the explication and utility of his theoretical concepts. Yet Clausewitz's teachings thrive because they are just as relevant today. This is clear from a reading of most of doctrinal literature, notably Field Manual 100-5, Operations.<sup>(1)</sup> But are the teachings of Clausewitz valid in the unique context of the Aleutians? If so, which lessons in particular? Are there any of those concepts which have no validity in the context of this campaign? What does that mean for the uses of theory? These are some of the questions which need to be addressed in a single campaign analysis which tests theoretical concepts.

Military theory valid during the time of Napoleon may not have the same currency in an age of nuclear weapons. This said as a disclaimer for universal theoretical utility; it is important to note that the Aleutians offer unique value as a single campaign study which merits the reader's time. The Aleutians present an opportunity to see an operational plan in depth from beginning to end. Isolated geographically and culturally, the Aleutians also provide a unique model for analyzing interstate war in one time and place. As a relatively recent campaign, there is enough literature about the event to allow a good study of the action. It has not been worked over like the multiple historical analyses of the Ardennes nor is it as obscure as the Buffs at Albuera.

The only difficulty in sources arises from the paucity of documents on the Japanese side. Guesswork is required at some points to measure the Japanese motivation for certain actions and to gauge their use of applied theory. But this look at both sides of the campaign is essential. Clausewitz made a critical and universally salient point that war is a duel between two combatants. The plans of one may never exact the desired responses of the other. This makes a review of the Japanese side not only relevant but essential to the study of the this campaign. The sources may be obscure but they cast a special light on the nature of this conflict which gives this study depth and dimension.

As one of America's first campaigns of World War II, the Aleutians offers another analytical advantage: it reflects the common shortcomings of an American first battle. The unique challenges of senior leadership, of joint command and control, and in preparation of untrained forces are all echoed in this story. That alone makes it worth a review. It was one of the first joint service operations in the history of the United States Army and Navy. Since joint doctrine was at a primitive level, the Aleutians operations stumbled several times because of interservice mistakes. Command and control architecture was poorly designed. Unpreparedness, uncertainty and a lack of confidence within senior leadership also marked the operation.

The Aleutian campaign was the first and only time Japanese forces landed on American soil during the entire war. The political effects of that landing both in terms of the national will and the War Department's struggle to establish an appropriate response make it

even more relevant within a study of theoretical principles. This aspect reflects both U.S. and Japanese consideration of what Michael Howard calls the "forgotten dimension" of strategy.(2) The powerful influence of national will has been cited from Clausewitz to Summers as a key element in both the formulation and sustainment of national strategy.

The need to provide an introductory look at the Aleutians is singularly important because of the unique nature of the topography. The Aleutians were unlike any other campaign in the Second World War. The closest military operation in modern history which can be likened to that experience may be the Falklands. In both cases the extremes of geography dictated a considerable part of the operational plan and the strategic goals. Austerity of the terrain, severity of the weather, and distance from both belligerents homeland marked the Aleutians campaign. The design and execution of air, sea, and land forces and their success and failures were always driven directly or indirectly by the powerful forces of geography. The hundred-mile-an-hour winds of the Williwaw, the omnipresent fog, the storms at sea and the jagged ruggedness of the barren islands contributed their own element of friction to the Aleutians campaign and were unmistakable in their influence and effect. Lines of communications were stretched over thousands of miles. For the soldier and airman it was a brutal and enervating fight in conditions of continuously limited visibility.

Yet the unique aspects of geography do not mean that the Aleutians are ipso facto uniquely irrelevant. On the contrary. The likelihood of an American joint operation conducted without a clear national end

state, without a thorough intelligence preparation of the battlefield and marred by interservice friction is reasonably high in the next several years. The U.S. experience in Grenada encapsulated all these elements. So too did the U.S. and Japanese experience in the Aleutians campaign. That campaign had many of the characteristics of a limited war, marked by its geographic isolation and the size of the combatants on both sides. Fighting against the Japanese on American soil gave the campaign a political dimension which is a common component of limited wars. In its errors and in its successes can be seen future U.S. operations in limited wars.

Finally, the theoretical concepts examined are not presumed to be universally valid. They may not be appropriate in this unique context. They may not be relevant in the setting of an American global power of the 1990's. Analysis discards or limits the utility of a theoretical concept which fails to work in particular cases, or has a logical flaw in the argument, or whose historical context has long disappeared. That too is a goal of the thesis, and one which can have as important an effect on the reader as the story of the Aleutians themselves. Context determines meaning. This is especially true in the unique context of the Aleutians. The validity of theory tested within the context of the Aleutians campaign represents benchmarks for theory in a single point in time and under the extraordinary circumstances of that special place. These disclaimers are necessary to establish the outlines of this argument. They show that its conclusions will not perforce radically change U.S. military doctrine. They simply represent another way of looking at the outcomes and the process of an American way of war

which may have some relevance for all soldiers in the future. Otherwise this simply becomes history.

### Definitions

The context of this argument not only posits the unique time and space of the Aleutians with the dissimilar actors of the U.S. and Japan but also an analysis of the operational level of war. It follows that a beginning must be made with a commonly accepted and understood definition of the operational level of war and operational art. The operational level of war is understood to mean sequencing tactical battles and engagements in a theater of operations in order to achieve the strategic objectives of a theater of war. The source for this definition is Field Manual 100-5 and the writings of Clausewitz in his magnum opus, On War. (3) The operational level is characterized by a clearly defined time and space, clearly defined strategic objectives which are pursued through tactical actions and a level of campaign planning --the setting of conditions-- appropriate to that strategy.

Operational art is less easy to define. Art is suggestively intangible. It represents the applied judgment of the commander in bringing together the successes and failures of his tactical operations in a way which support the advancement of his strategic objectives. It is not theoretical but applied. It can be characterized by the presence or absence of the inner eye, the coup d'oeil, which Clausewitz recognized as critical to the success of a military genius. It is exemplified by the will of a MacArthur

at Inchon and the farsightedness of Napoleon at Austerlitz. The absence of operational art on the other hand, was patent in the headlong bluntness of American military forces in Vietnam without regard for the political dau tranh of their foes. Operational art can be discerned only by a careful reading of a campaign to discover the skillful way in which a commander makes the best use of his means to accomplish the ends of his political superiors.

With these attempts at defining the operational level of war, does the Aleutians campaign fit the bill? Yes. It was fought in a theater of operations. It was fought with operational level forces on both sides in pursuit of national objectives. It was a series of battles and engagements designed to support the successful accomplishment of those objectives. It was a joint operation which placed the means at the operational level. It can be seen to have clear linkages in the strategic objectives and the attempt at operational execution. And it represented the leadership and command and control dimensions which are clearly in the operational level of ways. The fact that there were ways, ends and means mismatches, that senior leadership failed on both sides, that the linkages may not have been fully achieved, and that the outcome did not critically affect the overall strategic direction of either nation state is irrelevant to the operational context where the Aleutians rightly belong. In setting the strategic level of war in the Northern Pacific, this argument will demonstrate how the operational level on both sides achieved those strategic goals. The measure of that achievement is the arguably the measure of the operational success of each side's campaign.

## Strategic Considerations of the 'Forgotten War'

"History should be studied in breadth, depth, and context"

Michael Howard (4)

The Aleutian Islands are a desolate, treeless, relatively uninhabited chain of volcanic rock islands ranging one thousand miles in length from Attu in the West to the island of Unimak some 200 miles off the Alaskan mainland. With no economic value save a few colonies of blue foxes, no vital natural resources, no mineral or petroleum reserves at all, the Aleutians strategic value was ostensibly minor. In the early 1940's, United States presence was limited to radio relay and listening stations on the lesser islands and a small naval air station at Dutch Harbor in Adak. The Aleutians geographical significance though was paramount because of their accidental position as the closest U.S. territory to Japan. The strategic importance of the Northern Pacific was based on its direct proximity to the enemy, an oft-repeated line in the war time literature of Alaska. Maps with the Mercator projection of the world which adorned most American schoolrooms were seen as a villainous distortion of the actual geographic significance of Alaska since they did not represent true distances between the U.S. and Japan. The distance from West Coast ports such as San Francisco is approximately 4300 miles to Tokyo. The distance from Tokyo to Dutch Harbor is 900 miles. Air and sea navigation distances along the Great Circle Route are the shortest and most efficient between Asia and North America and therefore favor the Aleutian pathway.(5)

The Pacific War was fought over vast stretches of blue water. Control of sea routes was a strategic underpinning of the conflict. The Aleutians sat astride just such a principal route. The rising importance of air power and long range bomber threats, spectacularly illustrated by the Doolittle raid of May 1942, made the Aleutians a close in target for the Japanese. Conversely, the islands were a strategic launching base for the U.S.. The war in the South Pacific may have gotten the headlines and the priorities in the Pacific but Alaskans early in the war were certain that it would all come their way soon enough.(6) The most direct and therefore most dangerous path to the U.S., and specifically the West Coast of the United States was through Alaska went the theory. A strong case for this argument can be made on the air and sea lines of communications alone, assuming that the Japanese strategy envisioned an eventual invasion of the United States as a sequel to their Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere.

Another part of this argument was purely defensive in tone. Alaska was very much a forgotten theater of operations, and the Aleutians an unknown (and censored) war. A strong element in the wartime literature of Alaska argues that the "lower 48" was ignorant in general about "Seward's Icebox". This is difficult to refute. With a 1943 population of only 230,000 and no overland road from the continental United States to Alaska, "the forgotten war" is a valid phrase. Most of Alaska's small commercial infrastructure was centered around the Southeast Coast. The principal employer was the U.S. government, with a federally appointed territorial governor. The



Aleutians were a forgotten and lesser known region within the forgotten and unknown territory.(7)

The War Department relegated the North Pacific and the Aleutians to a minor role in a secondary theater of war. A tight censorship was also clamped on the region because it was so close to home.(8) The Japanese invasion of the Aleutians was a politically embarrassing event for the Administration and the military command in the area. The unexpected brutality of the ensuing campaign was not welcome news for an already battered War Department. And a good part of the censorship was purely operational security. The location and whereabouts of U.S. forces and their intentions in the Alaskan Command was hidden from the public to ensure what limited tactical and operational surprise could be gained in such an isolated theater.

The ignorance about the isolated, misunderstood and mysterious Aleutians would be reflected in the military design of forces and equipment by both the U.S. and the Japanese in the upcoming campaign. It was also reflected in the strategic priority afforded the Aleutians campaign when balanced against other requirements in the Pacific.

### The Japanese Strategy

I am thinking about Alaska. In an air war, if we are unprepared Japan could take it away from us, first by dominating the sky and creeping up the Aleutians. It could work both ways, of course. We could jump off from Alaska and reduce Tokyo to powder. But if we were asleep, without planes, Japan might well seize enough of Alaska to creep down the western coast of Canada. Then we would be in for it.

General Billy Mitchell, 1923 (9)

The Japanese strategy for 1942 was colored by unanticipated success throughout the Pacific. Not content to hold on to those major gains, General Tojo set forth an even more ambitious set of strategic objectives designed to further the ascendancy of the Rising Sun. This agenda called for seizure of the Solomons and New Guinea in an attempt to threaten Australia, and capture of New Caledonia, Samoa and the Fiji Islands. Samuel Eliot Morrison, the noted naval historian, also notes that a third major objective in this bold risk strategy was:

"...To capture Midway Island and the Western Aleutians, in order to enlarge the defense perimeter, bring the United States Pacific Fleet to a decisive engagement, and destroy what was left of it after Pearl Harbor..."(10)

Morrison further notes that the destruction of the U.S. Pacific Fleet was Admiral Yamamoto's idea. This brilliant architect of the Pearl Harbor raid was intent on finishing off the U.S. Fleet before it could be rebuilt. With all of these objectives accomplished, the end state envisioned by the Japanese was complete control of the Pacific from the Aleutians to Wake to the edge of Australia. Pearl Harbor's remaining facilities would then be bombed into "impotence" (11).

It is not clear from the available evidence if the Japanese deliberately intended to pursue their landings in the Western Aleutians with following invasions of either Alaska or the American Pacific Coast. They were never given the opportunity to execute such a sequel in the aftermath of Midway, but the conjecture is worth consideration. Just as clearly as Alaskans saw their homeland as the

natural stepping stone to the Far East, the Japanese saw it from the other direction. As Clausewitz emphasized in his theoretical analogy of the duel between two equally committed opponents, the Japanese were clearly masters of their own bold and far reaching operational plan in attacking the rocky isolation of the Aleutians. Not only would invasion establish a Northern link with the remainder of Japanese possessions throughout the Pacific, but the occupation of the Aleutians could and would raise many other political and military alarms in the United States.

The political end state was not defined by a unified political authority since the Japanese military dictated all strategic goals in their theaters of war. This may have been a contributing reason that the concept of occupying the Aleutians was strategically bankrupt at the same time it was operationally feasible. The Japanese could never have reasonably expected to maintain their position in the Aleutians. The distances involved were too far, even from the Northern most Japanese base at Paramushiro. The sustainment lines of communication could have been cut by either increasing amounts of sophisticated long range bombers or by the rebuilt U.S. Navy.

And what would the Japanese have gained --strategically-- if they could have held on to this barren rock? There were no vital national interests at stake. No scarce resources were available to help the war effort, no geographic center of gravity, no trans-Pacific chokepoint. By landing in the Aleutians as barren as they were, the Japanese trampled directly on American (albeit territorial) soil. This alone created special strategic risks because of the U.S. nationalist response.

Operationally, though, the Japanese had sound reasons for the campaign. As a Northern land base for their own long range bombers and as a naval refueling and refitting facility in the northernmost Pacific, the Aleutians were a good objective. Not only did they threaten the U.S., but they could turn 180 degrees East and threaten the Soviet Union if the latter was to violate the mutual non-aggression pact signed with Japan in 1941. Japanese occupation also represented a physical block to U.S.-Soviet aid which could have used the Aleutians as a lend-lease corridor similar to one established in Persia.

The Aleutians gave the Japanese an opportunity to jump off to either the Alaskan mainland or the U.S. West Coast or to seize U.S. coastal cities directly. Operationally, the Aleutians also promised the Japanese a dramatic public relations success simply because they had occupied a part of the United States. The effects of that occupation had a dramatic impact on both the Japanese and U.S. home fronts. It was a psychological operation triumph playing on fears of the U.S. West Coast and boosting the beleaguered home front in Japan after the disaster at Midway.

The Aleutians provided the Japanese with an opportunity to divert vital U.S. ground, air and naval forces. Japanese occupation of the Aleutians also represented a defensive strike at the forward air bases of the U.S. in order to hold back non-carrier launched strikes against the Japanese mainland. Doolittle's raid of 18 April 1942 had been a severe psychological setback for Japan. By seizing the Aleutians they could effectively cut off further landbased strikes from their northern flank.(12)

## The United States Strategy

You may have thought that the Chiefs of Staff in Washington were not paying enough attention to the threat against Alaska and the Coast. We realized, of course, that such a Japanese threat could become serious if it was unopposed. But we knew also that Japan did not have the naval and air power to carry the threat into effect without greater resources and a longer time to carry it out. Preparation to throw the Japanese from that foothold, that very skimpy foothold, had been laid on even before the Japs got there, and the rest of the story you know.

President Roosevelt 1944 (13)

U.S. strategy in the Aleutians before the occupation of Attu and Kiska was status quo ante. The meager resources of the Alaskan Defense Command made it difficult to execute a realistic plan to invade the Japanese through the stepping stones of the Aleutian chain. Stretched to their operational limits, U.S. forces from Sitka to Dutch Harbor were in a defensive strategic posture. They relayed information about Japanese movements in the Northern Pacific, and hoped that the Japanese would not bomb them before U.S. long range bombers arrived.

At the outbreak of the war, the United States had approximately 300 military personnel stationed in the entire territory of Alaska. By the time the Japanese struck at Dutch Harbor, that figure had risen to 33,000. The thrust of the defense effort prior to the attack was to steadily build westward along the Aleutian chain. Bomber bases were being established at successively closer positions to the end of the chain in an attempt to secure the region from Japanese invasion and serve as a springboard for long range bombing into the Japanese Kurile Islands. (14)

The War Department had not given Alaska anything more than a tertiary priority in a secondary theater of war. This decision can be easily defended. In the world of scarce resources for the war effort at in the 1941-1942 era, the priorities were logically elsewhere. Europe was number one. The Pacific was number two, and within the Pacific, the Northern region received its due after Admiral Nimitz and General MacArthur had sorted out their own theater priorities. The incorporation of the Aleutians chain into a priority for defense of the homeland would strain the credulity of that vital interest and stretch already taxed men and materiel.

#### Japanese Command and Control

Japanese command and control was unified and centralized throughout this operation. Orders for the operation were part of Togo's long range strategy to consolidate the gains of the opening stages of the Japanese war for conquest of the Pacific with secondary conquests throughout the new Empire. Directions for the conquest of the Aleutians came from Admiral Yamamoto, and the command of the operation was given to Admiral Kakuta, Commander of the Japanese Northern Fleet with headquarters at Paramushiro in the Kurile Islands.(15) Well familiar with the Aleutian Chain by virtue of both proximity, culture, and excellent reconnaissance over a previous decade of sub ros fishing expeditions, the Japanese command understood their mission and the extreme geographic hazards it implied.(16)

Japanese command and control was also characterized by attention to detail in the preparation of the landing force for the climatic harshness of the Aleutians. Self-sufficiency similar to the kind Slim was to encounter in Burma marked the Japanese troops. They were better prepared with rations -- both culturally and in terms of their logistics base. And they wore clothing far better suited to the Northern Pacific climate which they were inured to by custom and habit. Japanese appreciation for the importance of terrain as a combat multiplier was clear to the Americans in their assaults on Attu. Positions were well prepared and dug in making maximum use of the natural cover and concealment, and the tactical command and control systems established between units on the island as well as those operating in relatively independent missions were efficient and redundant.(17)

For the Japanese, the linkages between the tactical, operational, and strategic levels was compressed as if this were a limited war within the context of a general war. This was dramatically seen when the island of Kiska was evacuated -- unbeknownst to the U.S.-- on the orders of the Japanese High Command well before the Allied invasion arrived. The decision had been made not in reaction to U.S. moves, but in response to Japanese initiatives as part of their honest recognition of strategic failure.

A considerable part of the difference between the two command and control systems was cultural as opposed to any quantum increase in logic or efficiency on the part of the Japanese. Operational freedom of action was traded for strategic intent. That intent was clearly understood by every Japanese soldier. The Empire demanded he die

for the Aleutians as part of the greater gain the Emperor envisioned his sacrifice would bring. This code of the bushido in stark contrast to auftragstaktik of his Axis partner gave Japan no problem in communicating and relying on adherence to commander's intent. It is also dramatically illustrated by the fierce and deadly resistance the U.S. Army faced in its attempt to close out the last elements of Japanese resistance on Attu Island. Just as prisoner of war figures throughout the war in the Pacific indicated little or no Japanese taken alive, the experience on Attu was death to the last man. Here was a the final evidence of a mission literally to stand and fight in strict obedience to operational intent.

#### U.S. Command and Control

In 1942, The United States Navy was responsible for the North Pacific and the Aleutian Islands. (18) The Navy's priorities in the Pacific Theater were in the South, where the great campaigns of "Victory at Sea" were unfolding. The beginning of MacArthur's island hopping campaigns, the bloody struggles at Guadalcanal, Iwo Jima and Buna were receiving the attention and resources from the Pacific Navy. In a force of constrained resources in 1943, still hurting from the Pearl Harbor disaster, the North Pacific was clearly a minor theater. Strategically this was the correct analysis. The Japanese never mounted a major operation in the region. It was appropriately an economy of force campaign on both sides although marked by significant political risk.



The United States Army held responsibility for the Alaskan mainland -- separate from the Aleutian islands. The territorial defense infrastructure in 1942 reflected the theater's low priority. With General Simon Bolivar Buckner in command at the Fort Richardson headquarters, the Alaskan Defense Command (ADC) ran an austere operation with few Regular Army ground troops, the National Guard's Alaskan Scouts and some reserve elements. General Buckner commanded Eleventh Air Force units which flew their P-38's and medium bombers in extremely dangerous conditions on reconnaissance missions throughout the Chain. The ADC's operational objectives were limited to retention of the territory and building up aerial staging bases necessary for potential invasion routes to the Far East. The Navy in Alaska, operating under its own chain of command, consisted of local headquarters at Kodiak, a cruiser task force, a destroyer striking group, six S-class submarines, a PBY squadron and numerous Coast Guard cutters. No joint contingency plans for countering an invasion of the Aleutians or the Alaska mainland existed. If attacked, the Alaskan Defense Command was simply to hold on until reinforcements could arrive. (19)

Prior to the planning for the offensive phase, Alaskan military organizations were all stepchildren of distant headquarters. The Alaskan Defense Command in Anchorage was under the command of the Western Defense Command whose headquarters was in San Francisco. The Navy component of the U.S. Northern Fleet had its headquarters in Sitka and was under the command of the Naval District in Seattle. The Eleventh Air Force fell underneath the ADC but was not integrated with naval aviation. Neither Army nor Navy initially worked together

in the Aleutians prior to the invasion planning. They plied their separate missions from separate headquarters and communicated more socially than professionally.(20)

In the nine months it took to move from the defensive mode to the offensive mode, the U.S. chain of command never unraveled itself from a split system of joint operations. Much of this problem had to do with the great distances involved in conducting the operation, and much had to do with the state of joint operations at the time. The command and control system never resembled the kind of unified and centralized command structure of the Japanese. The result was a considerably less efficient campaign which failed to fully establish the operational conditions necessary to achieve both tactical victories and strategic success without the unnecessary loss of American lives.

Operational intelligence on the Aleutians was scarce. This was a significant problem. The terrain strongly determines campaign planning. Its rugged, mountainous, rock and severe weather define the force structure, the training, the uniforms, the sustainment, the leadership and the kinds of missions which can be undertaken. Intelligence preparation of the battlefield was consistently poor. There was little written intelligence information about the occupied Aleutian islands, and no source other than intermittent aerial reconnaissance to gather current data. Maps were out of date and showed little beyond the shoreline. The few occupants of the islands were captured by the Japanese before they could have been used as scouts. This intelligence vacuum was to prove very dangerous for the first American assault waves at Attu.(21)

The American Aleutian campaign was mounted on a shifting sand of secondary and sometimes tertiary priorities, a spare military infrastructure, split Army and Navy commands, and little operational intelligence. It had all the classic elements of an American first battle, the uncertainty and unpreparedness that John Shy writes about, and the other elements that Clausewitz defines for all war - danger, exertion and chance.(22) In retrospect it is amazing the campaign succeeded.

### The American Campaign

On 3 June 1943, the Japanese bombed and strafed the U.S. naval base at Dutch Harbor on the eastern Aleutian island of Unalaska. This brought the war to Alaska. The attack achieved tactical surprise and caused minor physical damage to the forward deployed U.S. air wing in the eastern Aleutian stronghold. 2,500 Japanese regular troops simultaneously occupied the western Aleutian islands of Attu and Kiska, easily overcoming the handful of U.S. soldiers garrisoned there. The campaign had begun.(23)

An immediate American response was ruled out for several reasons. As Morrison points out, weather was the principal obstacle.(24) Just as the British fought to get to the Falklands before winter set in, the U.S. forces in Alaska could not conduct a concentrated, joint offensive in the summer because of the dangerous weather of the Aleutians. Materiel had been building up in the first months of 1942 to reinforce Alaska against just such a contingency, but there were not sufficient forces available in any of the services for an

immediate joint operation. Japanese intentions were still unclear. A headlong rush against the initial landings might have been shortsighted until the full measure of the Japanese strategy in the Southern Pacific had been carried to its conclusion. The planning and conduct of the shift from defensive to offensive phases of the Aleutians campaign would take another nine months. (25)

What were the American goals of the campaign? Springboard for invasion of Japan is a recurrent theme in the books of the era, but this never appeared to be a realistic purpose for several reasons. As Murray Morgan points out in "Bridge to Russia", the distances were far too great and U.S. bomber technology far too immature to warrant a full scale invasion from the Aleutians. (26) The 'boomers' of the territory would use this as a trump card to encourage War Department construction and investment but it was never feasible. Political considerations with regard to the Soviet Union were as important in not invading as the extreme weather and austere logistics infrastructure. In mid - 1942, it was not certain what course the Soviet Union would pursue in the war save the destruction of Germany. Washington was unwilling to test the frigid waters of the North Pacific with an invasion which might create additional tension with the Russians. The Aleutians curve not southwards to Japan at their tip but northwards to the Soviet Kamchatka Peninsula. (27) At the end of the Chain there are a scant six miles which separate the U.S. from Siberia. The ancient land bridge of anthropology was not one the U.S. wanted to cross again in the summer of 1942.

Establishment of the status quo ante with an eye to continuing U.S. military buildup in the territory remains the logical strategic end state. Time was necessary to create the force necessary to evict the Japanese and plan an offensive operation over the great distances involved and against the unique geographic restraints extant. The campaign plan can be seen as three distinct phases: a bombing offensive to soften up Japanese resistance, the actual recapture of Attu and Kiska, and further offensive operations against the Japanese forces in the Kuriles. In the meantime, there would be stalemate, and the opportunity to do detailed planning. That opportunity was executed with varying degrees of professionalism.

#### The Hourglass Division

In January 1943 the War Department chose the 7th Infantry Division to conduct an amphibious assault of Kiska Island along with elements of the Alaskan Defense Command and supporting Naval units. In the months prior to its selection as the principal Aleutian force, the 7th had been training hard at its home base in Fort Ord, California for mechanized desert warfare in preparation for deployment to North Africa. Suddenly the 7th Division had 90 days to change its training objectives and logistics infrastructure and prepare for an amphibious assault in an entirely different theater of operations. This would be only the third amphibious operation of the the Second World War, and the first one in the history of the United States Infantry. As Brian Garfield notes in The Thousand Mile War:

American soldiers had made amphibious landings in North Africa, and the U.S. Marines had landed on Guadalcanal, but the Army had

no experience with amphibious fighting on islands, let alone Aleutian islands.(28)

CINCPAC and the Western Defense Command set up conferences on the plan, and provided the 7th Infantry with key senior staff from the Alaskan Command to help prepare for the mission. The Navy also provided Marine Corps amphibious experts to help train the 7th Division in what little time was available. This training, which was conducted in sunny Southern California, never simulated the conditions the infantrymen would soon encounter in the Northern Pacific.(29).

Senior leadership problems were to haunt the 7th Infantry Division throughout the entire operation. The division was regular Army, and had trained at Fort Ord during 1940 and 1941 under the leadership of General Joseph Stilwell. In the Aleutians campaign, leadership from regimental commander down to Medal of Honor winning privates proved sound.(30) But the Commanding General of the 7th, Major General Albert C. Brown, became a lightning rod for mistakes and miscommunications which led to his relief on the fourth day of the amphibious assault at Attu.

General Brown was a West Point graduate (ranking 76th out of 94) and a 1925 graduate of the Command and General Staff College (31). He had been in command of the the 7th Division for eight months when Operation LandCrab (The Attu Operation's codename) was proposed. His previous combat experience was in the Allied Expeditionary Forces 25 years earlier in muddy France. He had difficulties with both his Navy and Army superiors throughout the planning phase in deciding how the 7th would be employed, and he was decidedly cautious when

compared to LTG John DeWitt, Commanding General of the Western Department.(32)

General Brown had approved a sound plan drawn up by the Alaskan Command staff. It called for the Division to leave San Francisco and rendezvous with the Naval support flotilla off the forward naval base at Adak. The Joint Task Force, led by Admiral F.W. Rockwell, would then proceed to Attu Island for the amphibious assault. With supporting naval gunfire and air cover, the Division would retake Attu. Kiska would then be cut off and subsequently taken by another force.

Attu was 275 square miles of extremely mountainous terrain, but the Japanese force of 2,380 had chosen excellent key terrain to defend in anticipation of the U.S. attack. The U.S. tactical plan called for one infantry regiment to land in the south at Massacre Bay, a regiment to land in the North, and a regiment in the west, one regiment in reserve on the adjoining island of Adak. All three forward regiments would link up east of the main Japanese camp in Chichagof Harbor and destroy the remaining enemy force. U.S. assault forces involved would total approximately 17,000 men. The plan was doctrinally sound and it worked. (33)

The 7th Inf Division left San Francisco on 23 April, 1943. For most of the officers and men on board the final operational plan was unknown. Cramped in old troop transports, the men found themselves in a similar position as British troops some forty years later heading in the opposite direction to the Falklands. There was little opportunity for exercise under crowded conditions and the troops had a vague understanding of their mission. It was not a fortuitous

beginning. Anchoring off the Naval advance headquarters at Cold Bay on Adak ten days later, the Division waited for the word to go. By this time the mission was clearer and soldiers had been briefed on the plan. Fog delayed the operation for several more days. Admiral T.C. Kinkaid, CINC, Northern Pacific Fleet, left with his supporting warships in the middle of the delay to scout out a potential Japanese reinforcement convoy. When Kinkaid's fleet returned the night before the operation, it collided with General Brown's ships causing some physical damage and some shaken confidence. (34)

The landing was made on May 11 in heavy fog, and accomplished with relative ease. The Japanese had prepared beach defenses from which they fully intended to fight but gave up on the invasion forces after waiting through a week of weather delays. The Japanese commander gave a recall order to positions further inland. This unquestionably saved multiple U.S. casualties in what would have been a bloody beach fight. The element of chance had clearly begun to show its hardy self, precursor to several more appearances in this campaign.(35)

Over the next three days the Northern and Western forces made slow but steady progress against both stubborn Japanese resistance and the torturous terrain. However, the Southern force was bottled up in the valley between Massacre Bay and Holtz Bay with increasing casualties from murderous Japanese crossfire on the ridges. On the fourth day General Brown was relieved by Admiral Rockwell. Frustrated by poor communications with the 7th Division and mounting casualties, LTG DeWitt and Admiral Rockwell had lost confidence in General Brown's ability to command. The new commanding general of the 7th Division, Brigadier General Eugene M. Landrum (formerly the Deputy Commanding



General of the Alaskan Defense Command) ordered the Southern forces regimental commander to get up to the high ground and clear out the Japanese. This action broke the bottleneck. The remainder of the two weeks on Attu was a very bloody mopping-up. It included a final, suicidal charge of over 1,000 Japanese troops, all of whom were killed. (36)

In terms of percentage of losses for forces committed, those at Attu were the second highest in the entire Second World War. These have been estimated at 3,829 American casualties of which 549 were KIA, 1148 WIA and 1200 severe cold injuries. The Japanese sacrificed almost their entire force. Their losses have been estimated at 2,351 with 28 prisoners.(37) The high number of American losses was covered up for a few months by War Department censors who guessed correctly that the homefront would not willingly accept such figures for what was supposed to a relatively clean and simple operation. Indeed the losses are operational in many ways as opposed to tactical. In failing to set the conditions for the campaign in terms of proper clothing and materiel, the U.S. command directly contributed to the severe weather losses.

Most of the tactical actions, especially in the first week of the war can be characterized as headlong rushes into Japanese strength. Doctrine was not at fault here as much as misreading of enemy positions, strength and determination. Doctrine clearly spelled out ways to maneuver. The 7th Infantry's regiments simply used a series of frontal attacks against well positioned Japanese small units. (38)

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The campaign to retake the Aleutians was essentially over with the recapture of Attu. The operation to seize Kiska took place a few weeks later. 34,000 U.S., Canadian and Alaskan Scout forces marshaled out of Dutch Harbor to close the circle on the Japanese. In what was one of the great intelligence failures and embarrassments of WWII, the assault forces on Kiska landed unopposed to find that the 5,000 Japanese defenders had departed several days before. With the exception of a few long distance bombing raids by the Eleventh Air Force on the northern Kuriles within the year, the Alaskan adventure was finished for both the U.S. and Japan. (39)

### Senior Leadership

Field Manual 100-5 identifies four dynamics of combat power: maneuver, firepower, protection, and leadership.(40) The central element which determines whether these dynamics succeed in conflict is leadership. If the operational plan is sound but the operational leadership fails, then the plan fails. Clausewitz wrote extensively on this theme noting that special leadership is required to overcome the forces of friction in war. In the Aleutians, senior American leadership failures almost sank the campaign. These failures highlighted U.S. weaknesses in joint operations which consequently improved in the remainder of the Pacific War.

Why was General Brown relieved? Was he a poor commander or a victim of friction? Was he failed by his own leaders? Brown's relief was indicative of the general mood of the War Department, eager for victories to turn back the Axis tide. North Africa was

going well, Guadalcanal and Buna were reported as successes to the American public, and there was a strong propaganda opportunity at hand in a quick resolution of the Attu battle. Political reasons had kept the Japanese there -- North American soil was occupied for the only time in the war -- and those same considerations argued for the swift ejection of the enemy. Any delay by Brown was going to prove risky. MacArthur may have considered the same things when he sent Eichelberger to relieve Harding, and Eisenhower when he sent Patton to relieve Fredendall.

A more closely supportable motive for Brown's relief is the one identified by author Brian Garfield -- mistrust of Brown by his immediate superior, LTG DeWitt, CG of the Western Department. Brown was also on record as having trouble in communicating with his Navy bosses, Admirals Rockwell, JTF CINC, and Kinkaid, CINC Northern Pacific.(41)

At the San Diego Conference in February 1943 at which the Alaskan Command, CINCPAC, Western Defense Command and the 7th Division were all represented, LTG DeWitt boasted he could take Attu with one regiment in three days. General Brown disagreed, noting the difficulty of the terrain. This was perceived by DeWitt and the rest as unnecessary caution. (42) Brown got his three days at Attu and was fired. LTC Smith, DeWitt's assistant G-3, made a very strong case in the Western Department's after action report that command and control obstacles sank Brown. He points out that Brown initially commanded the task force from one ship, and was unable to see the landing. His Navy boss, Admiral Rockwell, sat on a different ship with communications between them reduced to an intermittent blinker

system, weather permitting. Once Brown went ashore late on D-Day, he lost communication with both higher and subordinate commanders. In the absence of radio reports from Brown himself, Rockwell and Kinkaid already alarmed by reports of little progress ashore, grew impatient. Finally, on the recommendation of General DeWitt and General Buckner - both at Adak 300 miles away -- Kinkaid relieved Brown and replaced him with Buckner's deputy, BG Landrum. (43)

In the fog of war complicated by the unfamiliar terrain of the Aleutians, the need for tight radio communications was essential. It would have gone a long way to sorting out the initial opposition on the ground and the progress of General Brown's troops. In the absence of that vital information, the assumption was made that Brown had failed and was not doing anything necessary to change the failure. A simple communication network planned well in advance with redundant nodes could have solved much of the leadership problems of the Attu debacle.

Here is an example of what S.L.A. Marshall wrote about in Men Against Fire.(44) There is an essential need for communication at each level for the tactical mission to be accomplished. In the tactical communications failures of Attu lay operational failure to recapture the island without severe attrition.

The importance of the personality of the commander, his ability to overcome the friction of war, and his critical need to maintain communications both up and down the chain of command were all important factors in the relief of General Brown. The perception that Brown was not succeeding and the lack of confidence in his ability to handle the terrain was too much for his bosses. Whether

the perception was reality is open to debate. It was easy to cast Brown as a scapegoat. He was eventually cleared by the Department of the Army on appeal, his relief officially overturned, and Brown given command of a division in the European Theater of Operations where he did very well. (45)

At the time of General Brown's relief the battle was essentially over, and would have probably been concluded in the same way with the original Commanding General. LTG DeWitt's prediction of a three day victory turned into three weeks of difficult fighting under the new 7th Division Commanding General. And yet most of the problems of Attu can be traced to leadership failures. Had General Brown required his G-2 to provide a more detailed intelligence preparation of the battlefield (IPB) the surprises and casualties of the first days would have been reduced considerably. Had General Brown required his G-3 to anticipate the joint fog of war and clearly establish a redundant communication system, the course may well have been different. Had General Brown pushed his G-4 to provide more realistic Class II support, he would have clearly had fewer battle casualties.

Leadership marred the success of the Aleutian campaign; its mission accomplished but at a high cost in American lives. There was no 'directed telescope' in the 7th Division to keep the commanding general informed about the progress on the ground or help him to report the situation to higher. Clausewitz wrote of the inevitable friction in war and the need for senior leadership to possess special qualities of will in order to overcome that friction. General Brown

was handicapped by his faulty command and control system and unable to exhibit enough will for his superiors to keep him in charge.

Senior leadership failures were not isolated to General Brown. Responsibility also belongs to LTG DeWitt for failing to ensure his Army component was properly outfitted and fully briefed. The Navy gets its share of the blame also for failing to cooperate more fully with the Army component across the board. Communications priorities go from higher to lower. The Navy as the Joint Task Force Command failed General Brown and then punished him for their own malfeasance. In failing to set the conditions for tactical success, the senior leadership of the joint task force failed at the operational level of war.

#### IPB in the Aleutians

Intelligence on the Aleutians was a major plus for the Japanese who had cultivated sources and information for several months prior to their invasion. For the U.S. it was just about the opposite. American presence in the islands was sparse, and the intelligence available prior to the landing in June 1943 reflected that poor understanding of terrain and enemy troop strength.

The IPB for the Aleutian campaign was marred both by inaccuracies and by selective use of what sound intelligence was available to the 7th Division G-2. In most accounts of the campaign, the number of soldiers on Attu was underestimated and the numbers on Kiska overestimated.(46) This factor coupled with a shortage of Naval support, led Admiral Kinkaid, CINC, Northern Naval Force, to

recommended two months prior to the operation that Kiska could be easily cut off from its lines of communication. With Attu now as the target, the IPB could be focused with the 60 days left. Unlike Buna, where enemy dispositions were not well known, intelligence on the locations of the Japanese at Attu was good. In the War Department's weekly G-2 summaries from the occupation of the Aleutians in June 1942 to just prior to the assault in May 1943, reconnaissance aircraft from Adak, Amchatka, and Dutch Harbor, provided regular reports of enemy activity. They noted for example, on March 1, 1943, "500 foxholes were counted in the vicinity of the new runway construction at Holtz Bay".(47)

Ignorance of the terrain was a major failure in the Attu battle. In his article on Attu, Robert A. Anderson notes that "maps were not available to depict the topography more than 1,000 yards from the shoreline.(48) In his after action report, LTC Smith noted that the terrain features were confusingly named or not known at all to the ground forces.(49) This coupled with the generally poor radio communications significantly complicated the ground tactical battle. Separated units had difficulty linking up at commonly understood points on the ground. Japanese knowledge of the ground worked to their distinct advantage in slowing down the Southern force's advance by pinning it down in the narrow pass between Massacre Bay and Holtz Bay.

In Garfield's account, misunderstanding of topography is also listed as a serious problem for the 7th. He notes for example, that General Brown failed to take advantage of an opportunity in early January to conduct a flyover reconnaissance.(50) Garfield however



failed to make his point completely (or deliberately omitted information). For in LTC Smith's after action report, he notes that at Fort Ord and on each troop ship en route to the landing, the 7th Division built terrain models of Attu, which proved to be helpful. All units were briefed by their tactical commanders on the plan for the assault while on shipboards.(51) It was terrain unfamiliarity once actually ashore, unsupported by detailed maps which created a tactical problem and held up the assault. Green 7th Division troops with no experience in the Sub-Arctic had to learn the ground quickly to stay alive. A good percentage of the Hourglass Division's high casualty percentages can be attributed to lack of detailed intelligence about the terrain itself.

#### Supplying the War in the Aleutians

Given the long distances involved in the Aleutian campaign, the dearth of information about its unique geography, and the mismatched forces which comprised the joint task force, logistics were bound to be a problem. The most obvious supply problem was the wrong uniforms for the 7th Division. War correspondent Howard Handleman managed to get through War Department censors within a few months of the landing in calling this shortfall "the worst mistake of the expedition"(52) He was specifically referring to the black boots issued to Division troops which turned wet feet into trench feet. LTC Smith's after action report also noted the improper uniforms and footgear.(53) And in Garfield's version, the Army had no cold weather gear pre-stocked

in the Pacific Theater. It was all in England and Africa with no time to transfer stocks to Fort Ord.(54)

The Japanese in contrast having occupied Attu for eleven months, were well clothed in footgear, outerwear, and rainwear, according to the final report of the G-2 for the Western Defense Command.(55)

Most classes of supplies for the 7th Infantry Division reflected adequate stocks. Sea lanes of communication were never seriously threatened during the battle and air superiority was always with the Eleventh Air Force. Naval ship shortages prevented General Buckner from augmenting the 7th Division so his 4th Infantry Regiment stood by on Adak in reserve. The distribution system on Attu was a man portable mode -- few vehicles were ever landed because of the untrafficable terrain. This affected combat power since it required a increasingly higher tail to tooth ratio. No wheeled vehicles could proceed further than the first mile of beachhead due to the rocky terrain, the muskeg, and the mud. Aerial resupply was strictly limited by weather, but the Division was never cut off from its LOC by sea, and did not experience any significant delays in resupply.(56)

### Conclusions

Japanese and Americans lessons learned were separate but equal in value. The Japanese failed to maintain clear linkages between the tactical, operational, and strategic levels of war. This led to their ultimate defeat. The Americans failed to establish fully the operational conditions necessary for tactical victory, losing both

valuable strategic time and the unnecessary lives of many fighting men. This was especially clear in U.S. problems with senior leadership and its command and control structure.

The linkages between the tactical, operational, and strategic levels of war will decide whether or not the political end state is achieved. Were the strategic objectives clearly delineated, logical and understood by the military? For the Japanese they were. Yamamoto's strategy was direct and unmistakable; in fact it was pursued blindly even after Midway had obviated the heart of the plan. This rigid adherence to the strategy simply bought time for its inevitable failure, and is an example of failing to adjust to a changing end state.

As bold as the plan was operationally and as dramatic the outcomes could have been, two major operational errors led the Japanese to the resultant stalemate and eventual loss. All levels of war are concerned with the match between ways, means and ends. The Japanese failed to give their local commanders the means necessary to hold on to the limited objectives Attu and Kiska represented. This meant that inevitably the U.S. would overcome the thinly held garrisons with its superior resources. Sustainment was the second major mistake. Paramushiro was the closest Japanese naval base, 650 miles away from Attu. Resupplying the garrisons of Kiska added another 378 miles to the voyages of the supply freighters. This presented a LOC target to the Americans which was quickly taken and which led to the Japanese eventual withdrawal. (59)

Operationally the Japanese were able to connect their tactical success to campaign goals as long as they kept the Americans away from Attu and Kiska. They held those lodgements for over a year, causing a successful diversion of American men and materiel away from the South Pacific. But operationally they were also doomed by time, having failed to maintain a secure line of communication with their logistics base at Paramushiro. Without this LOC, the Japanese could never bridge the gap between the operational level of war and the strategic. And even if they had been able to sustain operations longer than 1943, their own national end state had changed after the defeat at Midway obviating the original strategy for the acquisition of the Aleutians. Did they have the means to successfully hold onto the Aleutians? Yes, if they could have resupplied their forward deployment unrestricted by U.S. interdiction. This was an unrealistic hope and so their operational vision was marred from the outset.

How well did the Japanese planners think through the occupation of the two westernmost islands of the Aleutians? The islands were desolate and barren of resources. They presented tremendous hazards simply to get there and much worse perils for the soldiers required to occupy them. Prior to the invasion, the Japanese had done their homework on the Chain. They had sent in agents masquerading as fishermen for several months to ascertain the strength of the local settlements, the channels, and the best places to set up their occupation forces. They understood the dangerous climate and prepared their ground forces with far better gear, uniforms and rations than the U.S. was to do.(58)

But what was the sequel was to a successful occupation? An invasion of the U.S. was highly unlikely and not desirable in the overall strategic view. If the purpose was to create a Northern anchor in the Pacific, why didn't the Japanese give their task force the necessary means to accomplish the mission? The answer is that the war in the South Pacific was primary, and when that began to unravel with the failure of General Togo's second stage strategic objectives in 1942, the Aleutians lost their relevance and their resources. It was therefore a classic example of an ends, ways, means mismatch, an initially uncertain end state, and a shift in strategic goals without a concomitant symmetry in operational goals.

It is clear from a study of campaigns that end states are dynamic. As they change, the military must adjust accordingly. If the means available cannot support the new end state, then the operational planner has the responsibility to make it perfectly clear to the strategist. If the means can accomplish the end state but require a new plan, then the operational planner must be able to flex, clearly explaining his changes to the men involved—an essential element of communication which wins battles.

To the Americans the end state was the status quo ante. The Aleutians were never really seen as a jumping off point to Japan. Long range bombing had its obvious advantages, but the state of the art was relatively new, and the weather in the Aleutians made it a high risk operation. This is reflected in the casualty figures of the Eleventh Air Force which had the highest percentage of combat losses of any numbered air force in the Second World War. (59)

American campaign goals were achieved but at a considerably greater cost tactically and operationally than expected. This was due to poor planning and execution caused by a faulty command and control architecture and leadership problems at senior levels. As an American first battle, Attu was classic for its costly mistakes.

General Brown committed leadership mistakes which lost him his command and cost the invasion some early momentum. At the same time, the 7th Division was never fully supported by its own senior chain of command, especially with a good IPB or sound logistics tailoring. Communications problems exacerbated by inattention to detail caused severe problems throughout the fight. In many ways Attu was a typical example of difficult but successful small unit actions borne with considerable courage against severe hardships. Although regiments were committed, companies and platoons drove forward to Chichagof Harbor. This in itself is an important common thread in the early stages of U.S. ground combat of World War II. Yet it was clearly the mistakes of Attu which best characterize the period.

Attu exemplified early U.S. Army weaknesses in leadership, intelligence preparation of the battlefield, and logistics, in spite of the unique nature of the Aleutian Campaign. General Brown's relief was also characteristic of the Army's desire for clear-cut victories and commanders who were just as clearly subordinate to the pace set by their superiors. Historian Morrison summarized the battle in a similar vein:

The operation succeeded, although clumsily executed..the 7th Division owing to initial training for desert warfare and poor top leadership, showed little dash or initiative. After all, Attu was only the third amphibious operation of the war, and the reports of it, studied, and pondered...prevented similar mistakes in the future. (60)

General John Cushman has noted a series of major campaigns and battles which failed or were only partly successful due to the inadequacies of their command and control architecture.(61) This is another example of what Clausewitz called the simple being very difficult. The chain of command is an old and established principle. Yet failures at senior levels of command to organize staffs and forces properly, to maintain open and continuous communications and to solve problems without faltering in the crisis atmosphere war inevitably brings, continue to happen. These failures happened at Attu and in the last major U.S. operation within this decade, Grenada, 1983. Clear lines of command, understood by all commanders, and intent clearly fashioned and understood by all soldiers carries through in the presence of the costliest friction of war.

The Aleutians were different and unique for several reasons. The campaign was mounted in a rough stage of the development of joint operations and reflected the primitive stage of that methodology for the American military. The synergism necessary in the 1990's from all forms of combat power in campaign planning-- land, sea, and air -- was present in 1943 but not accounted for by the split service chains of command.

John Shy's closing essay in America's First Battles notes that a common theme in these opening conflicts was the heightened importance of uncertainty and ignorance.(62) The Aleutian campaign was certainly exemplary of both. The other three elements which Clausewitz listed as fundamental to war-- danger, exertion, and chance --were also present in large measure.(63) Unpreparedness and

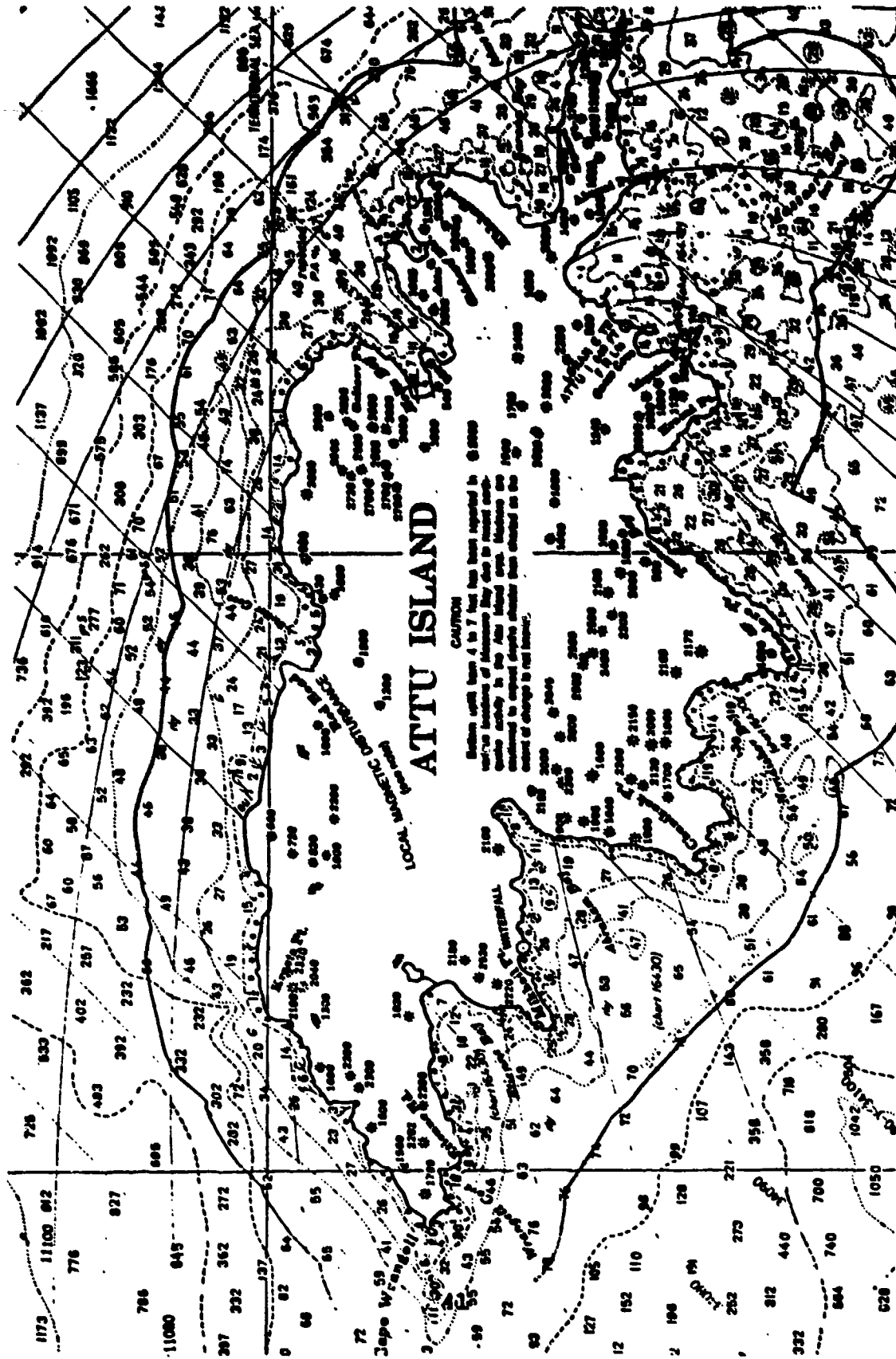
weaknesses in command and control are two other hallmarks of Attu and other American first battles.

But like the rest of those fights, the Aleutians cannot simply be taken out of its unique and extraordinary context to support the claims of theoretical principles of war. Shy notes that history does not give the present its own credibility -- that all history is somehow violated in its integrity by easy looks backward. This is a valid caution in attempting to apply useful lessons from this singular campaign to the realities of the future battlefield. However, empirical support exists in this campaign to reinforce widely held beliefs about the patterns war takes, the way its actors move, and the way in which attention to its fundamentals causes change. The Aleutians are well worth the time and attention of today's operational planner and commander. In its mistakes are seen theoretical concepts confirmed and denied which have important meaning for the 1990's. This campaign, unique in its geographic context, is universal in its meaning for today's operational artist.

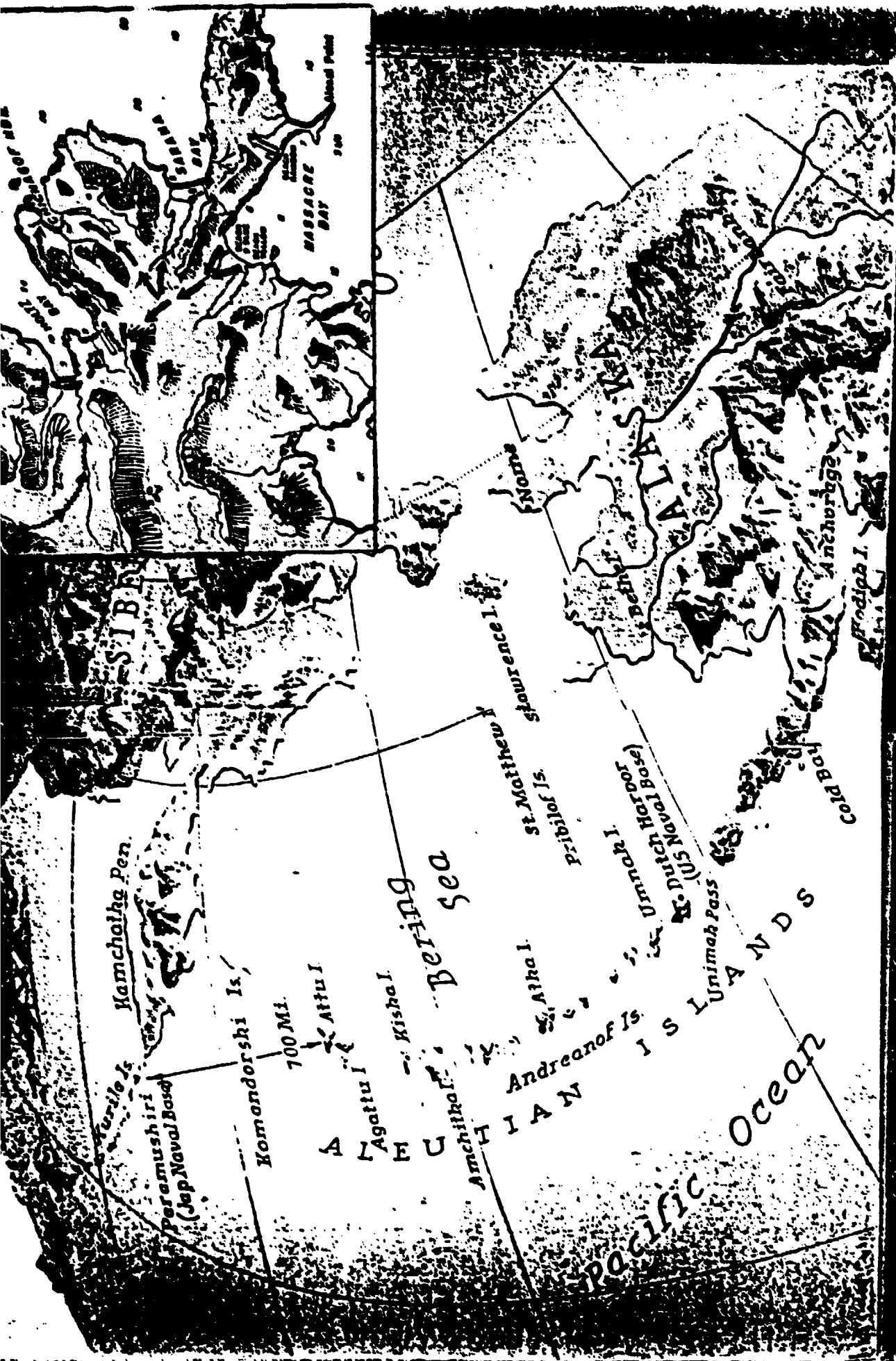
If war is the testing ground for all theory, then the campaign in the Aleutians was a partially successful experiment which pointed up the long road ahead for joint and combined operations. It also invested new currency to previously held theories about the need for timely and accurate intelligence, sound command and control, the requirement for appropriate logistics, the maintenance of clear linkages between all levels of war, and the unmistakable value of strong senior leadership.



# Appendix A



Courtesy Hank Frese



### ENDNOTES

1. Field Manual 100-5 Operations, Washington, D.C., 1986, pp. 179-182.
2. Howard, Michael, "The Forgotten Dimension of Strategy" Foreign Affairs, May 1985, pp. 12-18.
3. FM 100-5, p. 10. See also Schneider, James J., The Theory of Operational Art, SAMS Paper, 1 March 1988, p. 2.
4. As cited by Colonel Gage Williams, School of Advanced Military Studies, April 2, 1988.
5. Several books written during the wartime era in Alaska make reference to these facts. They include William Gilman's Our Hidden Front, New York: 1944, pp. 6-8., Howard Handleman's Bridge to Victory, New York: 1943, pp. 16-20, and Corey Ford's Short Cut To Tokyo, New York: 1943, pp. 32-33.
6. Ibid. See Also Potter, Jean Alaska Under Arms, New York: 1942, pp. 9-29.
7. Op. Cit.
8. Gilman, pp. 4-5.
9. Morgan, Murray, Bridge To Russia, New York: 1947, p. 139.
10. Morrison, Samuel Eliot, Strategy and Compromise, Boston: 1957, p. 71.
11. Ibid, p. 72.
12. Garfield, pp. 3-6.
13. Morgan, p. 139.
14. Potter, pp. 30-56.
15. Garfield, Brian, The Thousand Mile War, New York: 1969, pp. 3-4.
16. Morgan, p. 139-140, and Weckerling, John Final Report of the Reduction and Occupation of Attu From The Combat Intelligence Point of View. San Francisco: Western Defense Command, 1943 throughout.
17. Weckerling, Op. Cit.

18. Doe, Major William, "Operation LandCrab", unpublished paper, Fort Leavenworth: 1987, p. 9.
19. Morrison, Samuel, History of United States Naval Operations in World War Two, New York: 195 , pp. 37-41. See also Driscoll, Joseph, War Discovers Alaska, Philadelphia:1944,pp. 101-121, and Potter, pp. 30-56.
20. Doe, pp. 5-7.
21. Garfield, pp. 204-207.
22. Shy, John, "First Battles in Retrospect", America's First Battles, edited by Charles E. Heller and William A. Stofft, Lawrence: 1986, pp. 327-352. Clausewitz, Carl von, On War, edited by Michael Howard and Peter Paret, Princeton: 1984, pp. 113-122.
23. Garfield, pp. 205-307.
24. Morrison, History of United States Naval Operations in World War Two, Volume VII, p. 5.
25. Ibid. pp. 37-41.
26. Morgan, pp. 140-142.
27. Ibid. p. 31.
28. Garfield, p 209.
29. Ibid. p. 208.
30. In all battle accounts, cases of individual heroism and leadership are well documented. Even LTC Smith's After Action Report which slanders General Brown, commends his regimental commanders. Private Joe. P. Martinez, 32nd Inf Regiment won the Medal of Honor on Attu on May 26, 1943.
31. Register of Graduates and Former Cadets of the United States Military Academy, West Point, 1983, p. 307.
32. Garfield, p.200.
33. See Morrison, Chapter 1, Garfield et al. In LTC Smith's AAR to LTG DeWitt, he noted that the "book" (doctrine) was valid at Attu; basic infantry tactical teachings worked out on the cold ground of the Aleutians. See also the doctrine of maneuver spelled out in The Principles of Strategy for An Independent Corps or Army in a Theater of Operations by the Command and General Staff College, 1935-1936. Strength figures are from Garfield, p. 249.

34. Garfield, p. 212.

35. Ibid., pp. 214-221.

36. Smith, LTC Lynn, Preliminary Report on Attu Landing, San Francisco, 1943, p. 18. Smith was DeWitt's ground observer. His official report is an excellent source; critical of General Brown's leadership. It was only recently downgraded to unclassified. One reason may be that LTC Smith recommended in his AAR that all troops receive a daily ration of one ounce of whiskey. He sincerely believed this would help to ward off the bitter Aleutian weather.

37. Anderson, Robert A. "Attu: WWII's Bloody Sideshow", Army, May 1983, pp.47.

38. Garfield, Anderson and Morgan have the best accounts of the battle tactics. Doctrinal texts such as the current Operations manual clearly discussed maneuver tactics. Ignorance of the terrain and the withering fire of the enemy from well defended positions paralyzed tactical maneuver in the first few days of the operations.

39. Garfield, p. 291-300.

40. FM 100-5, pp. 12-13.

41. Garfield, Chapter 15. In January 1943, LTG DeWitt originally wanted the 35th Division but was overruled by the War Department. This was the beginning of a serious split between DeWitt and Brown that snowballed throughout the next three months.

42. Ibid., p. 203.

43. Smith. pp. 10-19.

44. Marshall, S.L.A. Men Against Fire, New York, 1947, pp.

45. Garfield, p. 324-325.

46. Ibid. p. 202.

47. Bratton. R.S., "Monthly G-2 Summary", Washington, D.C., April 1942, p. 1. Colonel Bratton was the Assistant Chief of Staff, G-2., the War Department

48. Anderson, p. 41

49. Smith, p. 10.

50. Garfield, p. 203.

51. Smith, p. 4.
52. Handleman, p.119.
53. Smith, p. 25. No camouflage (white) uniforms were available to the 7th Infantry Division. Basic issue, cotton fatigues were the standard outerwear, supplemented by field jackets - no parkas.
54. Garfield, p. 205.
55. Weckerling, John Final Report of Reduction and Occupation of Attu From the Combat Intelligence Point of View, San Francisco, Aug 1943. p. 37. This is an outstanding research source. The order of battle is very well documented as well as extensive descriptions of weapons, clothing, shelters, diet, etc. (98 pages).
56. Smith, pp. 4-25.
57. Driscoll, p. 29.
58. Smith, pp. 6-30.
59. Murray, Robert Haynes, The Only Way Home, Brantley Printing Co., Waycross, Georgia, 1986, p. 155.
60. Morrison, p. 3.
61. Cushman, LTG John H., Command and Control of Theater Forces, Harvard, March 1986. Shy, John as quoted in America's First Battles, Ed. Charles E. Heller and William A. Stofft, University of Kansas Press, 1987.
62. Shy, p. 328.
63. Clausewitz, p. 119-121.

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